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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 DUBLIN 000657

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: GOI WAITING FOR IRA RESPONSE AND COMMITTED TO GFA

REF: LONDON 4254

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Kenny for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) During Special Envoy Mitchell Reiss' visit to Ireland May 19-22, the Irish government emphasized that the Good Friday Agreement and the December 8 joint communique must be the basis for forward movement in the peace process. They anticipate an IRA response to Gerry Adams' call to leave the scene within 60 days; they believe the focus must be kept on the IRA but do not have a specific list of steps the IRA must take as pre-conditions to serious negotiations. They believe serious talks will begin in September, but it could take until early 2006 to put the pieces in place, especially since the DUP would require a long period to verify IRA good behavior. GOI officials uniformly expressed concern that the UK's political interest in showing progress might lead the UK to be too soft on Sinn Fein. Other issues raised include Irish unhappiness with the UK's inquiry into the Finucane murder; the importance of a non-violent marching season in Northern Ireland; and concerns about IRA criminality. Reiss briefed on his meetings in London and Belfast and informed them of the USG's decision to refuse a visa to Sinn Fein member Rita O'Hare.

2. (U) Mitchell Reiss met with the Taoiseach, PM Bertie Ahern; Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern, Justice Minister Michael McDowell; Finance Minister Brian Cowen; and, UK Ambassador Eldon. The Ambassador, DCM, POL/ECON Counselor, and S/P Special Assistant accompanied him to all meetings. Reiss and the Ambassador also had a private lunch with President and Dr. McAleese. END SUMMARY

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COMMENT  
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3. (C) GOI concerns about UK "softness" represent a role reversal. Usually, it is the UK that is concerned Ireland will be too accommodating to Sinn Fein. The GOI's eventual position will depend on the Taoiseach. He is generally considered "softer" on the provisional movement than either the Foreign Affairs or Justice Ministers. However, he believes Sinn Fein leaders were aware of plans to rob the Northern Bank even as they negotiated with him last Fall. Publicly, he has been unprecedentedly critical of Sinn Fein and, until recently, greatly reduced private contacts as well. We are told that Adams prefers to deal directly with the Taoiseach and not with cabinet ministers. In deciding how to move forward, the Taoiseach is likely to look carefully at the IRA's response to Gerry Adams, given strong public feelings against IRA crime and paramilitarism. He is expected to call elections in 2007 or sooner. Having a deal in place would serve his political interests best; however, more failed attempts to reach a deal would hurt him electorally, particularly if he were seen to have been played by Sinn Fein. End Comment.

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TAOISEACH ADVISOR DESCRIBES GOI EXPECTATIONS  
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4. (C) Michael Collins, Second Secretary General in the Taoiseach's Office and senior foreign affairs advisor, opened the meeting with an update of GOI actions. He said there had been very little GOI engagement with Sinn Fein since the talks broke down in December. He cited one meeting in January, one in March in Washington, and several private meetings between the Taoiseach and Gerry Adams. Significantly, he said the official feelings toward Sinn Fein had changed with all that has happened since December (Northern Bank robbery, money laundering, McCartney killing.) Collins said the GOI is interested in the Good Friday Agreement and not in any "lesser models or deals." Following UK elections, the pace was picking up, he said, and he outlined a series of expected contacts with all parties. He said the GOI was pleased at PM Blair's re-election, and that Sinn Fein is aware that this is Blair's "last lap." That, he said, plays both ways. Sinn Fein knows that no successor is likely to be as engaged in the process as Blair, and that he represents their best hope of a deal. On the other hand,

Sinn Fein also believes they could take advantage of Blair's interest in getting a deal before leaving office. Special Envoy Reiss, referring to his talks in London, said it is never good in a negotiation to appear more eager than the other side. Collins said the UK had offered Sinn Fein a package following the December 8 breakdown, but withdrew it after the Northern Bank robbery. (Note: Sinn Fein has frequently expressed anger at the UK for "going back on its word." While never specifically mentioning a post-December 8 package, during the negotiations, Sinn Fein seemed confident that the UK felt Sinn Fein's decommissioning offer was worth taking up even if a comprehensive deal with the DUP was not reached.)

...KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE IRA

15. (C) Collins indicated the focus must be kept on the IRA. The GOI, he said, hopes for decisive action, followed by a "proving period" and leading to talks that restore the executive. He anticipated that it might take until late fall or early in 2006 to put all the pieces together; the IRA would need to do something definitive within two months, and the DUP would likely require a six-month testing period before agreeing to sit down with Sinn Fein. Collins said there is little appetite within the GOI or the Irish public for going "round and round again." He said GOI will not go about talks in a "headline way." The credibility of the process and the players is in question, he said, and this time, talks must work. A deal is possible, he said, but will take time. Reiss responded by saying Gerry Adams had told him to expect an IRA response in a month, before the marching season. Reiss said Adams had stated that "the IRA must be taken out of the equation." Reiss noted that public tolerance of accepting things at face value is gone. The IMC must confirm that the IRA takes any actions it promises. When the Taoiseach joined the meeting, he said that verification would have to include witnesses of decommissioning (probably clergy), in addition to the IICD, as layed out December 8.

...QUIET MARCHING SEASON NECESSARY

16. (C) Collins, Reiss and the Ambassador agreed that tensions were high as marching season approaches, and it is vitally important that violence is averted. That message needs to be delivered to all parties. The Ambassador asked who is engaging with the Parades Commission; Collins said there is a disconnect between the Parades Commission and the PSNI. All agreed that a violent marching season could set back prospects for political progress.

...DUP FLEXING ITS MUSCLES, INCLUDING REGARDING POLICING BOARD

17. (C) Collins and Reiss exchanged views on the DUP, following their big win in UK elections. The Ambassador noted that DUP is looking to flex its muscles, and should not be allowed to unwind existing mechanisms, such as the Policing Board, whose mandate expires October 18. Collins agreed and said the GOI favors renewing the policing board in its current form.

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TAOISEACH DISCUSSES WAY FORWARD  
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18. (C) The Taoiseach joined the meeting, and layed out his vision of the way forward. Like Collins, he felt any deal was many months away, with talks not starting until September and a deal not likely until January. The Taoiseach then discussed what he felt was realistic to expect from the IRA. He said that no one can expect the IRA to agree to disband; rather, it could enter a new commemorative role. His own father, he said, considered himself to be an IRA man to the day he died in the 1990's. IRA members, he said, consider themselves to be soldiers and their IRA membership is the center of their lives. They could, however, convert to a commemorative organization that visits graves and plans events to mark the anniversaries of atrocities. The Taoiseach said he had explained this to DUP leader Ian Paisley. By the same token, the Taoiseach said Sinn Fein knows that they have milked the process as much as they can. He said that "Gerry understands criminality must end", even if he will not say that the IRA has been involved in crime.

19. (C) Reiss described changes in perception within the Irish-American community. Their conversations with the Taoiseach, and the IRA's words and actions following the McCartney murder were giving them a more realistic view of the IRA. The Taoiseach agreed, but noted that it is still hard for much of Irish-America to accept that the IRA was involved in the murder. Reiss then informed the Taoiseach that the US had refused Sinn Fein member Rita O'Hare's visa request.

...TAOISEACH RAISES FINUCANE

10. (C) The Taoiseach raised the Finucane case, as did every other GOI official with whom Reiss met. Reiss briefed him on his talks in London, including with the head of MI5, who committed to turning over all evidence her agency has to the inquiry, but she was adamant that the inquiry will proceed using the new legislation. Reiss noted his concern that the Finucane case will become an irritant in Irish relations with the UK and get in the way of a deal. The Taoiseach said that the entire parliament was united in opposition to the UK approach. Parliament does not believe the UK will give all evidence because, in its view, the UK did not cooperate fully with the Barron commission's investigation into the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings. The Taoiseach said that the GOI wants the UK to provide evidence acknowledging its involvement in Finucane's murder and it wants to know how high in the UK government collusion went. He said if the UK were to provide the information, it would only grab the headlines for a few hours because "everyone knows the UK was involved." Other ministers made the same point and noted that the Taoiseach is particularly seized with the Finucane case and would have to personally approve any compromise to ease the dispute with the UK, such as Reiss' suggestion of putting an Irish judge in charge of the inquiry.

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FM ECHOES PM ON IRA, GFA, CONCERN ABOUT FINUCANE  
AND MARCHING SEASON  
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....IRA

11. (C) FM Ahern said he liked Reiss' public comments that the IRA should respond "sooner rather than later," and he agreed with Reiss that the IRA statement must be clean, with no ambiguity, and that the three governments need to agree on what they want from the IRA. In the end, the DUP must also be on board in order for a deal to be struck. FM Ahern was adamant that the Irish government was interested in a comprehensive deal only, and was concerned that the UK might be open to Sinn Fein's desire to cut a side deal with London. He said that such talks between the UK and IRA were underway in December between the breakdown of talks and the Northern Bank robbery. Such a deal, he said, would have allowed Sinn Fein to barter decommissioning for concessions. Moreover, he said, a bilateral deal between the UK and Sinn Fein would polarize the situation in Northern Ireland.

...Sinn Fein

12. (C) FM Ahern said that Sinn Fein knows serious negotiations cannot begin unless trust is re-established. On the other hand, he said, maybe that's not what they want. (Note: FM Ahern is here referencing the theory that Sinn Fein finds engaging in the peace process in its interest because it softens the image of the party and gives them photo opportunities with prime ministers. According to this theory, the process is in Sinn Fein's interest, but Sinn Fein is not actually interested in striking a deal.) FM Ahern also touched on the balance the GOI tries to strike in talking about and to Sinn Fein. He said PSNI and others told the GOI that its tough line on Sinn Fein since December had been helpful but no longer was, and they should "lighten up." On the other hand, the GOI also is asked why it talks to Sinn Fein at all, given that the International Monitoring Commission reports that they are continuing their activities. He noted that it is difficult for the two prime ministers to say "no" when Gerry Adams asks for a meeting. He said Sinn Fein is insisting on working out details at the top level of government only. (COMMENT: This is tactically smart of Gerry Adams, especially if he, like others, sees the Taoiseach as less tough on republicans than the outspoken Justice Minister or quieter but equally firm Foreign Minister.)

...Parade Season

13. (C) Adrian O'Neill, from DFA's Anglo-Irish office, said intelligence sources were worried that malcontents were planning to disrupt the marching season. He noted that the DUP and Orange Order were "playing games" with the Parades Commission, and repeated the view that PSNI and the Parades Commission were not connecting well. He said the GOI is particularly worried about the "walk back" -- after the parades and drinking, when marchers and hangers on walk back through republican areas. Special Envoy Reiss said that a violent marching season would play into the hands of those who believe that only the IRA can protect Catholic communities.

...Finucane

14. (C) FM Ahern raised the Finucane case, saying categorically that the UK was not complying with its 2001 Weston Park commitments. He said the GOI has lived up to its obligations and begun investigations into several cases. O'Neill noted that the UK had pushed through its new

Inquiries Act and that the Finucane family would not cooperate on that basis.  
...Policing Board

15. (C) Special Envoy Reiss noted that the Policing Board was set to expire on October 18, and asked for Irish views, including on whether there were policy consequences of choosing to "continue" the board or to "reconstitute" it. FM Ahern said he had spoken to Northern Ireland Secretary of State Peter Hain about the issue. He said the GOI favors continuing the board, but the DUP wants to reconstitute it. He asserted that the DUP has no legal right to demand reconstitution on the basis of its electoral gains. FM Ahern also said he had raised IRA crime with Peter Hain, especially in the context of cross border cooperation between the Irish Criminal Assets Bureau and the Northern Ireland equivalent.

...International Fund for Ireland (IFI)

16. (C) As he has done publicly, FM Ahern talked about the importance of continuing IFI activities and the need to maintain donations from other governments. He said it is increasingly difficult to tap EU peace and reconciliation funds. FM Ahern talked about the need to reorient the board toward reconciliation and policing, and noted the board was considering a five-year strategy, ending in closure. He asked for U.S. views. The Ambassador noted that supporters of Ireland in the U.S. understand that the Ireland's economic boom means that international contributions to IFI will end at some point. One difficulty, he said, is that unionists only recently have taken part, and will insist on getting their fair share of grants. Special Envoy Reiss said that the IFI's new ideas for policing are likely to be acceptable under U.S. law.

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Justice Minister McDowell focuses on the IRA  
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17. (C) Justice Minister McDowell, always the hardest hitting of the Irish cabinet, opened the meeting by saying that the Good Friday Agreement presumed the IRA would go out of business and it is still in business seven years later. He said the provisional movement (as he refers to jointly to the IRA and Sinn Fein) regards its arms cache as an embarrassment. Its sentex and kalishnakovs do not serve any useful purpose, he said, and the provisionals do not want to leave weapons in the hands of dissidents. He said the provisionals consider their arms stash a political liability that undermines their claim to be pursuing their goals through peaceful means only.

18. (C) Minister McDowell believes the provisionals want to close down the hardware side of their operation but to stay in business to fund national and international programs. He also said that the provisionals give no indication of loosening their grip on national areas in Northern Ireland where PSNI does not go. For that reason, he noted, the provisionals want to hold on to personal weapons.

19. (C) McDowell said some lessons have been learned about how to deal with the provisional movement. McDowell said that you only get concessions from the provisionals when you put your hand on their throat. When you play their propaganda game, they press for concessions. McDowell said he was "delighted" that Sinn Fein was not invited to the White House on March 17. Looking forward, he said, the GOI was not in appeasement mode, and should offer a cold shoulder to the provisionals. Sinn Fein, he said, is "asking for warm words" but governments should not offer them. He credited Sinn Fein with being "brilliant negotiators." They create eagerness and a sense of partnership, as if to say, "let's get together to sort out Sinn Fein problems." What they cannot stand, he said, is skepticism. McDowell said he has warned Peter Hain against side deals with the provisionals, especially now that there is no center ground in Northern Ireland.

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Finance Minister Brian Cowen  
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20. (C) In pursuing a political solution for Northern Ireland, the British and Irish Governments needed to address the economic dimension to the peace process, Finance Minister Brian Cowen told Ambassador Reiss in a May 20 meeting. Cowen cautioned against an approach that focused on establishing institutions of self-government, while neglecting equally urgent economic imperatives, such as improving social services and tackling unemployment. He expressed concern that HMG might wish to disengage from these challenges after a solution was reached. While the British Exchequer had made statements on the limits of UK financial support for the peace process, Cowen believed that HMG and the GOI could jointly foster a transition in Northern Ireland toward an economic system less dominated by the public sector. This

cooperation could take the form of coordinating Ireland's National Spatial Strategy with the North's development plans; there was also the possibility of harmonizing tax rates and key commodity prices to spur cross-border investment. Ambassador Reiss agreed that it was important to avoid scenarios where economic difficulties would continue to fuel social tensions even after a political resolution was in hand.

21. (U) This cable has been cleared by S/P.  
KENNY